

WHO: Europe entering 'plausible endgame' to COVID pandemic

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Hans Kluge, Regional Director for Europe at the World Health Organization (WHO) hold a press conference with Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Peter Szijjarto, right, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Budapest, April 21, 2021. The director of the World Health Organization's Europe office said the continent is now facing a "plausible endgame" to the pandemic and that the number of coronavirus deaths is now starting to plateau. During a press briefing on Thursday, Feb. 3, 2022 WHO's Dr. Hans Kluge said there is a "singular opportunity" for countries to take control of COVID-19's

transmission. Credit: Zoltan Mathe/MTI via AP

The director of the World Health Organization's Europe office said Thursday the continent is now entering a "plausible endgame" to the pandemic and that the number of coronavirus deaths is starting to plateau.

Dr. Hans Kluge said at a media briefing that there is a "singular opportunity" for countries across Europe to take control of COVID-19 transmission due to three factors: high levels of immunization due to vaccination and natural infection, the virus's tendency to spread less in [warmer weather](#) and the lower severity of the omicron variant.

"This period of higher protection should be seen as a cease-fire that could bring us enduring peace," he said.

As the winter subsides in much of Europe in the coming weeks, when the virus's transmission naturally drops, Kluge said the upcoming spring "leaves us with the possibility for a long period of tranquility and a much higher level of population defense against any resurgence in transmission."

Even if another variant emerges, Kluge said, [health authorities](#) in Europe should be able to keep it in check, provided immunization and boosting efforts continue, along with other public health interventions.

He said, however, this demands "a drastic and uncompromising increase in vaccine-sharing across borders," saying vaccines must be provided to everyone across Europe and beyond. Scientists have repeatedly warned that unless the majority of the world's population is vaccinated, any opportunities for COVID-19 to keep spreading means it could mutate

into deadlier and more transmissible forms.

Numerous countries across Europe, including [Britain](#) and [Denmark](#), have dropped nearly all their coronavirus restrictions after saying that omicron has peaked. Others, including [Spain](#), are now considering whether to consider COVID-19 to be an endemic problem that might be handled more like seasonal flu.

At WHO's Geneva headquarters, director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned that the world as a whole is still far from exiting the pandemic.

"We are concerned that a narrative has taken hold in some countries that because of vaccines—and because of omicron's high transmissibility and lower severity—preventing transmission is no longer possible and no longer necessary," Tedros said Tuesday. "Nothing could be further from the truth."

The agency has said even countries with high levels of vaccination should not succumb to [political pressure](#) and release all of their coronavirus measures at once.

Kluge noted that there were 12 million new coronavirus cases across WHO's European region last week, the highest single weekly total during the pandemic. He said that spike was driven by the hugely infectious omicron variant, but admissions to hospital intensive care units haven't risen significantly.

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